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SUBJECT: DRC: PRESIDENT KABILA'S VISIT TO FRANCE

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: DRC President Kabila's July 16-17 visit to Paris went smoothly, MFA DAS-equivalent Helene Le Gal reported on July 17, with an emphasis on economic issues centered on reducing or canceling DRC's IFI debts. Debt reduction has been complicated by new debts DRC has incurred with China. Kabila addressed security issues in eastern DRC with FM Kouchner, who offered encouragement rather than sending stern signals, with Kabila saying that he hoped the security situation would improve by the end of the year. President Sarkozy indicated that he would visit DRC in 2009 but Le Gal said that nothing firm has been set. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) MFA DAS-equivalent for Central Africa Helene Le Gal on July 17 provided a readout on DRC President Laurent Kabila's July 16-17 visit to France, which she described as a success and the substantive part of which had concluded by the time of her readout. Kabila met with the full range of dignitaries in Paris -- President Nicolas Sarkozy, FM Bernard Kouchner, Minister of State Jean-Louis Borloo (Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development, and Territorial Management), Senate President Christian Poncelet, the Secretary General of the Organization for Francophonie Abdou Diouf, and leading representatives of the French business community. Le Gal noted that France and DRC were one year into the 2007 Partnership Framework Agreement that would provide French assistance amounting to between 170 and 235 million euro during the 2007-2011 period (the amount is intended to be flexible and to vary as circumstances change).

3. (C) Le Gal said that Kabila's talks with GOF officials focused primarily on economic issues, with IFI debt reduction/forgiveness being his main subject. France wanted to help in this area, Le Gal said, with Sarkozy suggesting some sort of assistance package not in 2008 but rather in 2009. Le Gal stressed that France sincerely wanted to help but she said that DRC was not doing itself any favors -- she noted that while trying to seek favorable arrangements with the IFIs, DRC had in the meantime incurred significant new debt through certain commercial dealings with China. This, she lamented, consisted of the all-too-common practice involving Chinese loans that were to be repaid by providing raw natural resources for export to China. The IFIs frowned upon a country's incurring new debt while it was in the process of trying to reduce or eliminate prior debts.

4.. (C) War and peace issues took a backseat during the visit, Le Gal said, with both sides wanting to portray the visit as a "normal" one rather than one taking place in a crisis atmosphere. Kabila did discuss security issues in the eastern part of DRC with FM Kouchner. He claimed that significant progress would take place there by the end of 2008. Kouchner, for his part, offered encouragement and did not scold or threaten, according to Le Gal, although he did raise specifically the issue of sexual violence and the need

to refrain from engaging in that practice. Again, Le Gal said the overall tone was positive and encouraging. She noted that the question of political rival Bemba's situation in facing arrest and eventual trial by the ICC was not mentioned at all in any talks Kabila had with French officials.

¶5. (C) Sarkozy responded to Kabila's invitation by indicating "somewhat vaguely" that he would visit DRC "sometime in 2009" and would bring along a group of French business leaders with him. Le Gal discounted this, however, noting that Sarkozy had recently made several "promises" to African leaders that he would visit "next year," without making a real commitment or ordering that this be formally placed on his agenda. "We'll see if it happens," she remarked, although she added that given Sarkozy's propensity to travel on short notice, a visit could well take place. Concerning French business interests in DRC, Le Gal said that the French were not nearly so involved in extractive industries as were the Chinese, suggesting that this might be an area that French businesses might want to pursue.

¶6. (C) In closing, Le Gal observed that the visit had gone well, that no major bilateral problems arose, and that it was relatively "routine," which itself was a welcome indication of the progress DRC had made and which France hoped to continue to support.

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